

WHEN LIFE SEEMS TO SWALLOW YOU WHOLE - Thoughts on God's Will from the Book of Jonah - Part 6
Sunday , August 9th - 6:30
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

1) **HERE IS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF HOW NOT TO PRAY**

Jonah 4:1-3 - "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.'"

A) *First, his words to the Lord are full of complaint and grumbling.* There is nothing of *faith* in anything Jonah says. True, he is talking to God. But he is still justifying what he has done. He is almost unraveling any remnant of earlier repentance. Honesty is good, as long as it's a *humble* honesty, one that remembers who is the all-wise God and who isn't.

Don't misunderstand. Yes, you can be *honest* with God. You see this over and over in the Psalms. You don't have to pretend. But you can't be *full of self* and please God in prayer.

See how David catches his own heart in the middle of the same process and turns it around - **Psalm 73:13-16 - "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. [14] For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. [15] If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed the generation of your children. [16] But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task...."**

Back to Jonah's prayer and the second thing we learn:

B) *Second, his mind is totally centered on himself.* Prayer is primarily about *God*. It should be a time of exposing and developing our lives before him like film that's being developed. But there is little about God in Jonah's prayer. It's self-pity he's wallowing in.

Again, see the opposite of this in **Psalm 25:4-5 - "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. [5] Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long."**

C) *Third, Jonah's prayer shows no thanksgiving.* He has much to be grateful for. He's been delivered from the digestive system of a large fish. He's conducted perhaps the most successful evangelistic meeting in world history. But he never even thinks of these things.

Also, note that fruitfulness in a ministry endeavor doesn't prove purity of heart and life. God can, in His boundless grace, use warped lives to bless others. He even used pagan nations and individuals in the Bible to extend his grace. Never measure the spirituality of a person by the size of his or her ministry influence.

D) Fourth, Jonah doubts the wisdom of God. It is one thing to not fully understand what God is doing. His ways are not always obvious to us and we don't have to pretend they are. But it's another thing entirely to place your conceptions of what is proper and what is good above His. Verse two is nothing but an **"I told you so"** to God - **Jonah 4:2** - **"He prayed to the Lord, "Please, Lord, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster."**

E) Fifth, there's no love in Jonah's heart. This is the deepest and clearest clue that Jonah is warped inside. Whenever love is lacking, even if my excuse is a defense of holiness, I'm always on the wrong track.

Jonah is pouting because God has shown **grace** - **"And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster"(4:2).**

2) GOD DOESN'T ANSWER JONAH'S FOOLISH REQUEST OF DEATH

Jonah 4:3 - **"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."**

Perhaps there is no greater proof of God's merciful love than the fact that He doesn't answer our stupid prayers. Nothing more needs saying. More often than not, we need to learn to attribute God's silence to **wisdom** rather than **indifference**. This would cause His apparent inactivity to **increase** our faith rather than **decrease** it.

3) GOD RESPONDS TO JONAH WITH THE OBJECT LESSON OF THE VINE AND THE WORM

Jonah 4:5-8 - **"Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. [6] Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. [7] But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. [8] When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."**

The big thought is this: **the things we fall in love with are so small.** This not only warps our affections, it dulls spiritual insight. It makes all our values foggy and earth-bound. Usually, a whining heart like Jonah's is one fixating on the wrong things.

Selfishness always blinds us to God. The Ninevites were people created by God, in His own image, with

immorality stamped into their nature. They aren't as important as the work of God in the hearts of men. Yet Jonah can't be moved by their lostness. But he **can** grieve over the loss of vegetation that momentarily provided him with comfort from the heat.

Behold the human condition. Ironically, we can sometimes make the same mistake with our own souls. See **Luke 9:24-25** - **"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. [25] For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"**

4) **NOTICE THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN AND ANIMALS**

Jonah 4:11 - **"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"**

There are only so many ways to explain these tricky words. Who are the 120,000 people who can't tell their right hand from their left? They must either be small infants or the developmentally challenged. The idea is the same with each. God's grace hovers over those for whom moral responsibility isn't possible.

I find it moving that God **knew** how many such people there were. He keeps track of them. Such is His compassion, and we must share in it. God cared about people Jonah was prepared to ignore. He still does. God loves the babies, the weak and even the world of nature. This is how He wants us to think.